

# information

## National Environmental Policy Act

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is our nation's charter for the protection of the environment. NEPA ensures that, when major federal actions are planned: (1) environmental impact evaluations are done, (2) the public is involved, and (3) federal officials make decisions based on an understanding of environmental consequences.

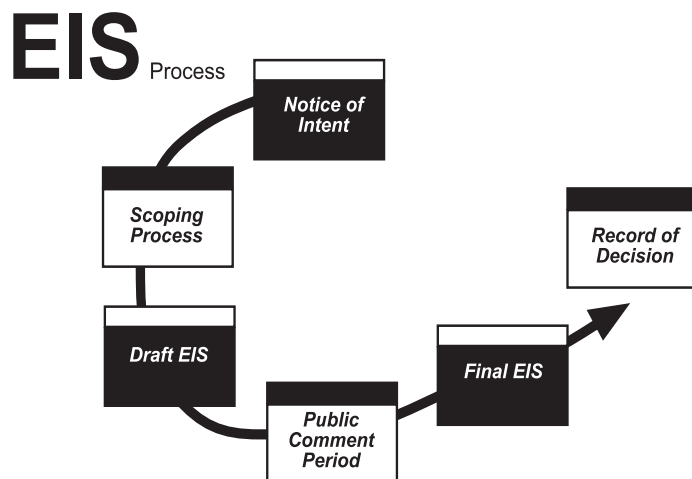
NEPA was signed into law in 1970. It requires the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prior to any major action by federal agencies if the action has the potential to significantly impact the environment. The EIS examines those impacts and assesses their effect on public health and safety.

Under NEPA, the term "environment" includes the natural and physical environment (air, water, biological resources, geography, geology) as well as the relationship of people with that environment (social economics). An "impact" is a change or consequence that results from an activity. An EIS describes impacts as well as ways to "mitigate" (lessen or remove) adverse impacts.

An EIS is prepared in a series of steps: gathering comments from federal, state and local agencies, and the public to define issues and alternatives important for analysis (a process known as "scoping"); preparing the draft EIS; receiving and responding to public comments on the draft EIS and preparing the final EIS. An EIS does not make decisions; it provides information officials use when making decisions.

Agencies begin the scoping process by publishing a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register*. The NOI describes the action the agency is considering and provides background information on the action, possible alternatives and potential impacts. The scoping process is a period of time when the public can provide comments to help define the issues that should be covered and to help determine the alternatives to be analyzed. The public, as well as federal, state and local agencies, and Tribal Governments are asked to provide input.

Next, the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is written and made available for public review and comment. NEPA requires a minimum



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45-day public comment period. Important issues and reasonable alternatives raised by the public and agencies during the scoping process are addressed in the DEIS.

The final EIS contains responses to comments received during the public comment period, written and oral, as well as the revised EIS text.

Once the final EIS is published, a minimum 30-day waiting period is required before a decision can be

made. A Record of Decision (ROD) notifies the public of the decision made on the proposed action and the reasons for the decision. After the ROD is published, agencies may proceed with the action.

The NEPA process promotes public awareness at the earliest planning stages and provides opportunities for the public to be involved in the process by participating early in the scoping phase and during public comment periods.